

SCARED TO QUIT SMOKING?

<https://www.webmd.com/smoking-cessation/features/your-quit-smoking-fears-debunked>

You know you should quit for your health's sake. So, what's holding you back?

Maybe you are afraid of the weight gain.

Maybe you are afraid of the mood swings.

Maybe you are afraid it won't work or that you will fail.

But, what if you can lay your quit-smoking fears to rest once and for all? Here's what experts want you to know about why some of those fears aren't what they're cracked up to be, and why none of them should keep you from quitting.

Fear: I will gain too much weight.

Many people worry about gaining weight when they quit smoking. But not everybody who quits gains weight. According to Michael Steinberg, MD, MPH, director of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey's Tobacco Dependence Program, "Nicotine is an appetite suppressant, so when people do stop smoking, they tend to have an increased appetite."

But if you do pack on pounds, the average gain is between six to nine pounds, not the 50-100 people fear. Take steps to thwart weight gain by keeping your exercise routine up or launching a walking program. Stash only healthy snacks and replace empty-calorie carbs.

Fear: My social life will tank.

There is an element of smokers banding together and establishing a common bond over smoking. "When someone quits, that group solidarity may be at risk, but that's a small part of the overall social interactions people have," says Michael Eriksen, ScD, director of the Institute of Public Health at Georgia State University.

It may help to skip hanging out with smokers for a few weeks until you've got a handle on your quitting.

Fear: I'll be in a chronic bad mood.

"Nicotine is clearly a very powerful brain drug that gets into the brain quickly and results in dopamine release," Eriksen says.

In other words, smoking makes you feel calm and content once you're addicted.

One of the known nicotine withdrawal symptoms is depressed mood. It's a physical response to taking tobacco smoke and nicotine out of your system and your brain.

"Since depressed mood is a withdrawal symptom, we do stress that people seek some type of treatment, whether it's their primary care provider, a tobacco treatment program or a telephone quit line," Steinberg says. That way if you do become depressed when quitting, you can discuss it with a professional.

By the time you're smoke-free six weeks to two months, most of the physiological symptoms, including depressed mood, are history.

Fear: The damage is already done

It's never too late to quit smoking. The benefits start within hours of your last cigarette and they continue for years down the road.

For example, Steinberg says that quitting smoking today reduces your risk of heart attack starting tomorrow – and by the first year your risk is cut in half. “It’s a lame excuse to say you’ve smoked too long, you already did the damage, or you have to die from something,” Ericksen says.

People who quit have fewer complications from their medical problems, have fewer additional medical problems, and their response to treatment for medical problems improves if they’re not smoking.

The earlier you quit the better off you are. But it’s never too late.

Fear: I’ll fail

No one likes to fail. Quitting smoking is one of the hardest things someone can do. Nicotine is one of the most addictive drugs there is.

If you’ve tried quitting several times in the past, seek a different method. If you went cold turkey, look into nicotine replacement therapy.

If you previously went about it on your own, join a support group or call a quit line this go round.

People who quit on their own have a less than 5% success rate. Yet people who use all the resources available to them often quit successfully on the very first try. There’s no magic

number that you have to get to the second, fourth, or sixth quit attempt before you are successful.

Eriksen says two things can ultimately ensure a successful quit attempt. One is a desire to quit for yourself – not for your spouse, your boss, or anyone else. The second is confidence in your ability to succeed. If you couple those two things, you boost your odds of success.

Data show 7-9% of smokers would like to quit and wish they'd never started, Eriksen says. Once you're ready and you have the desire and the confidence, you're on your way to success. Don't be afraid. Give it a shot.

